

January Gardening

By: Melinda Sperl

Happy New Year's everyone! We really ended 2013 with some cold weather, which was a bit unusual for our yards, and we are starting 2014 with even more cold with a freeze coming tonight. Cover your plants and protect your irrigation system. Make sure you turn your irrigation off during a freeze so you don't have icicles in the morning.

Appearances can be deceiving and there is maintenance that can be done during the winter that will save you from sweating in the summer. Even though I am a heat lover I know a lot of you actually prefer cooler weather so embrace one of the more temperate days and head into the yard.

This is the absolute perfect time to trim trees. The sap is not flowing in your trees now. Insects are attracted to sap of a tree and when you cut tree branch in the warmer months the sap will flow to the cut branch to heal the "wound". Insects will then swarm to that sap for a feeding frenzy. Trees are not like shrubs though and they take 5-10 years to recover from a trimming. Make sure that you hire a reputable company to trim your trees; not normally the same people who mow your lawn! Arborists are a specialty service all of their own and cheap is not something you want to think about when trimming your tree as one bad trim can actually shorten the life of a beautiful tree. Look for future articles on how to trim properly.

One winter project is to review the area where the flowerbeds meet the foundation of the house. The soil level should never be close enough to reach the weep-holes of the house or above the foundation level of the house. Moisture could then enter the house so either the soil should be lowered, or a drain should be installed.

You could also make sure that the soil and mulch level surrounding your plants and trees is lower than the root flare of the plant. This is obvious for trees as we really avoid the Mulch Volcano that is so prevalent from bad landscaping. But what is less obvious is mulch that covers the root crown of the plant. This eventually will kill the plant especially in our 100-degree summers.

Another project is to take note of where you had Brown Patch this year. If it is in the same spot every year, then it is a sign of where water sitting or a low water area. There are two main causes of Brown Patch, low spots or high nitrogen fertilizer. If you notice Brown Patch in the same area from year to year, then it is a water retention area. Maybe you want to make a map of the low areas now while the grass is dormant so that when spring is here you can level those areas.

If possible, hold off trimming plants. Plants are in survival mode now. Any trimming that is done now on a deciduous plant can cause serious damage if not death to the plant. Of course, if a plant is damaging your house or absolutely has to be trimmed do what needs to be done, but trim as little as possible.

Stock up on Pre-Emergent Herbicides now. We will be using them in early spring and now is a good time to purchase them. It is a bit early to apply them though.

Happy Gardening!

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